It has been long established in the “brotherhood” that there are some topics that must be avoided in order to keep peace... and your job. Near the top of that list are FOOD and GLUTTONY and even the slightest suggestion of FASTING for spiritual purposes. But in such caution, we can find ourselves dismissing some important Bible concepts, and maybe missing out on a stronger spiritual life.

In fact, Fasting is a major subject in Bible revelation. Moses, David, Elijah, Esther, Daniel, Anna, Jesus, and Paul – all fasted. There is more teaching on fasting in the New Testament than repentance and confession. Jesus taught more on fasting than even baptism or the Lord’s Supper!

Sure, the subject leaves a “bad taste” in people’s mouths. One - because of its abuse throughout the centuries by churches forcing it upon people. Two - because it may mean I don't get cake.

But what does the Bible say? And how are we to integrate these teachings into our lives?

Let me first begin with a survey of the Old Testament. Yes, we know this is by no means binding on our practices today. However, I want you to get a glimpse of God’s approval of fasting from long ago.

1) The Day of Appealing to God
   a. Leviticus 16:29-31 - This is the only time fasting is “commanded” in all of Scripture.

2) In Days of Seeking God’s Mercy
   a. Deuteronomy 9:15-18 – In hopes that God would hear, Moses fully focused on Him.

3) In Days of Eminent War

4) In Days of Sick Loved Ones
   a. II Samuel 12:15-17 – In times of sorrow and appeal to God for mercy and restoration.

5) In Days of Mourning Loss
   a. II Samuel 1:11-12 – When feeling loss and anguish, they did not eat.

6) In Days of Stress and Disappointment
   a. Nehemiah 1:3-4 – In sadness and looking for an answer, he fasted and prayed.

7) In Days of Difficult Decisions
   a. Esther 4:15-17 – She was about to put her life on the line and asked others to fast.

A couple of things are easily noticed.
Firstly, fasting was a regular part of the lives of Israelites.
Secondly, in times of emotional intensity, they fasted.
Thirdly, prayer and fasting seem to go hand in hand.
Fourthly, it seemed to be ABOUT FOCUS ON GOD – removing other distractions/endeavors – just God.

We are about to head to the New Testament, starting in the Gospels and then the book of Acts. At no point will I be able to show you that Fasting is a command of God for Christians. In fact, it is hard to even prove it was for the Israelites. But I want you to see how they put things aside, even good and wholesome things, so that they could RUN TO GOD, FULLY FOCUS ON GOD, and be heard.

Let’s look at fasting during the time of Jesus. Keep a couple of things in mind: 1) This was still under the law of Moses where fasting was common practice. 2) Jews had abused it with heavy regulations and rules about how often and in what way people would fast.

1) Jesus fasted in connection with T.A.G.
   a. Matthew 4:1-2 – We don’t know why, but we see it something Christ deemed right.

2) Jesus taught about proper fasting
   a. Matthew 6:16-18 – It is personal. An appeal of focus upon and reliance upon God.

3) Jesus explained fasting must be appropriate
   a. Matthew 9:14-17 – Here it was in times of sorrow. It is not a religious rite. It is not to lose weight. It is not appropriate in times of celebration. But it can have its place.

4) Jesus combines powers of prayer and fasting
   a. Matthew 17:14-21 – Perhaps they needed more connection with God. Prayer and fasting would give them that focus on God and accomplish much.
So, in Christ I learn some things. First, He did not command it, but did speak of its practice. In fact, He demonstrated that giving up liberties (like food) can lead us right to the feet of God in a special way.

But what about after the New Law was established? Did fasting continue in the lives of Christians?

1) **Christians fasted together with the Lord’s Work**
   a. *Acts 13:1-3* – They fasted as they did the Lord’s work and in anticipation of good works.
   b. It seems to clearly be a mental cleansing and focusing upon God’s work above all else.
   c. Even giving up food and perhaps other things to just think about the Kingdom.
   d. Do we need to set some time aside (individually and collectively) to focus on the Work?

2) **Christians fasted together in selecting new elders**
   b. Likely they took time and engaged in little else but beckoning for wisdom from God.
   c. Should we be setting aside wholesome things to contemplate spiritual things?

A few things must be noted here.

**Firstly,** this does not necessitate a command for all Christians individually or collectively.

**Secondly,** however, giving up lawful things to simply engross oneself in spiritual things is practiced.

**Thirdly,** in times of great weight and importance, it was even done as a group.

**Fourthly,** this idea seems to extend to fasting in other areas beside food – *I Corinthians 7:4-5.*

I am not advocating fasting as a law for Christians. But I submit to you that we share many things in common with all of the people we have studied. From the Old Testament, through the Gospels, and the New Testament Church ---

- We need to set aside time to appeal to the mercy and forgiveness of God.
- We need to cope with sadness and stress by escaping to God and His goodness.
- We need undistracted prayer time so that we can get lost in His glory and His glory alone.
- We need to be fully focused on the Lord’s work, our work, and how to serve Him best.

Are you impressed by the fact that, throughout all time, men have given up things like food and marital privileges, simply to give all their attention to God? Do we need this?

We do. While the Epistles rarely mention Fasting after the book of Acts, the results of it are commanded and emphasized throughout the New Testament – *Colossians 1:9-12, 18; 2:6-7; 3:1-4.*

**Bottom line:** we can accomplish all of these things with PRAYER and without FASTING... maybe. You see, for some of us, these lawful things around us have become our ESCAPE, our REFUGE, instead of God. When we are hurting, we EAT. When we are lonely, we PLAY IPAD GAMES. When we don’t know what to do and life is hard, we marathon a TELEVISION SERIES. We become addicted to these things because time lost in them HELP us through things. They become our crutches, our escape, our means of getting by.

**It is time for fasting.** It is time to ESCAPE to GOD. It is time to take REFUGE in HIM alone. It is time to be addicted to the peace that comes from His Word and His Throne and Him. When we don’t know what to do, it is time to pass up and put aside the old “go-to’s” and GO TO HIM.

Sure, this could turn into a rant about OBESITY from overeating, WASTEFULNESS through electronics addiction, or SPIRITUAL DEMISE through TV over Bible. But that’s not the point tonight. The point is that these are happening because people are letting FOOD, PHONES and TELEVISIONS fill their time, instead of TIME ALONE WITH GOD.

So, we need Fasting! After all, the point is to get fully focused on God. If these things are supplanting that, we need fasting. I don’t want them to control me, dictate my mood, or keep my mind off of God. So it is time for fasting.

I am not proposing 40 days without food. I am not proposing a church effort to haul televisions to the trash dump. I am proposing we find what we go to for peace and set it aside for a while and go to God instead:

- *One month without sugar.* When stressed or craving, let it remind me to Read and Pray and be with Family.
- *One week without coffee.* Instead of refilling the cup, let that feeling drive you to Prayer in the Spirit.
- *One day this week without Cell Data! Red light or home, don’t pick up that phone. Talk to God and Family.*
- *One day a week without Television.* Family prays and plays and talks with one another.

**WHY?** Because I need it to more fully focus on what matters? ... YES. They didn’t fast all the time, but it snapped them out of the normal indulgences and brought them to God. Do you need that? Do it this week to reset your focus on God. Then, do it when needed. When things are tough. When sorrow is heavy. When work needs to be done. Clean the slate of distractions. And why not start tonight? If we can help you go to God, skip the meal, skip the game, skip answering that text... and go prostrate before the throne of the Almighty God.